



**DIVISION OF HEALTH AND
MEDICAL SERVICES**
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Community Health Services
Disease Prevention
Family Health
Health Promotion
State Epidemiologist
615 East 4th Street
Pierre, SD 57501-1700

24 October 2008

To: Principals, K-12 schools in South Dakota
From: Lon Kightlinger, State Epidemiologist
RE: School absenteeism for influenza (flu) surveillance

Influenza season is coming soon. Influenza (flu) strikes South Dakota each winter making thousands of school children sick. The flu is a viral respiratory disease that attacks schools with particular severity. It is important to monitor illness and outbreaks in student populations.

The easiest way to monitor influenza is to simply count the number of children absent from school weekly due to "illness". Although this is a blunt measure, it gives a good indication of when influenza is striking a region of the state.

The Department of Health requests your voluntary assistance. Please count the number of students absent due to illness* each week for each attendance center. Fax the information to the Department of Health using the enclosed form on the following Monday. For your convenience, you may use the same form all season; just use the next line each week.

Information requested:

- Name of attendance center;
- County;
- Total enrollment;
- Number of student absent days due to any illness*;

The data collected are confidential and voluntary. School-specific information will not be released or published. Weekly aggregate school absenteeism summaries will be included in weekly influenza updates that are distributed state-wide and posted on the Department of Health Website. If you wish to receive a copy of these updates, please contact Vickie Horan, 773-6195 or 800-592-1861.

*Only illness absentees are to be reported, not absentees due to sports trips, school activity trips, dental appointment, vacations, etc. A student is counted for each day absent. If a student is absent 3 days in a week she is counted 3 times.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Vickie Horan, Influenza Surveillance Coordinator, 773-6195 or 800-592-1861 or vickie.horan@state.sd.us .

South Dakota Influenza website: doh.sd.gov/flu